

How Long, O Lord?

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Psalms, and that short psalm that we read, Psalm 13.

Psalm 13, we're going to walk through this psalm, but if we just read again from the beginning. Psalm 13, the psalm of David.

How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? How long, O Lord? How long? How long, O Lord? How long? How long? As you know, when you're on holiday and you're traveling a long distance, there's only so much of the radio that you can listen to, and there's a limit to how many sermons that you can actually take in, which is why it's always good to listen to some music in the car.

[1 : 22] But with kids in the car, some of the, well, the Christian children's songs, some of them are good. You can actually learn a lot from the children's Christian songs. But a lot of what the children like to listen to, well, to be honest, is not really my cup of tea, and I make that quite known to the boys.

But you know, there's one band that we all seem to agree on, on listening to in the car, and it's a Christian band, the answer to your first question, Christian band called Sovereign Grace Music. Sovereign Grace Music. If you've never heard of them, look them up. They're a brilliant band because they're biblical, and they're also very reformed in their theology. And that's certainly expressed through their music.

And one of our favorite songs by Sovereign Grace Music is their version of this Psalm, Psalm 13. And so I put the song into this week's email if you want to listen to it yourself and hear what they have to say.

Because the lyrics of the song, they beautifully express and explain the sentiments of Psalm 13, where this is what they write. This is how the song begins.

[2 : 27] O Lord our God, to you we come. Will you still hide your face? We cry before you, and on our knees we pray. How long, O Lord?

How long? Our sorrows leave us weak and worn, surrounded by our fears. We look to heaven through feeble faith and tears. How long, O Lord?

How long? And then there's this answer given in the chorus. And the answer given to the question, how long, O Lord? How long? And this is the answer. Till your glory fills our eyes, and our faith is turned to sight.

Until our thirsty souls are satisfied. How long, O Lord? How long? How long is it going to be till your glory fills our eyes, and our faith is turned to sight, and our thirsty souls are satisfied?

How long, O Lord? How long? And that's the question I want us to ask this evening as we turn to Psalm 13. How long, O Lord? How long? Because, you know, as you read through the Psalm, and even when you consider yourself, when you feel distant from God's presence, or when you doubt God's promises, or when we're distressed about God's providence in our life, we might question, how long, O Lord?

[3 : 51] How long? But, you know, from David's experience, and that's why it's here in this Psalm, David's experience is here to teach us. And what we learn from Psalm 13, what we learn, we learn about the problem with patience, the petition for patience, and the promise of patience.

Psalm is all about patience, waiting upon the Lord. How long, O Lord? How long? So the problem with patience, the petition for patience, and the promise of patience.

So first of all, in verses 1 and 2, we see the problem with patience. The problem with patience. David prays, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

You know, in Psalm 13, David, he's directing his doubts and his distress, not to the elders of the city, or to the priests in the temple, or to the government in Israel, or to the kingdoms of this world.

[5 : 05] No, David, King David, he's directing all his doubts and all his distresses to the greater than King David. He's directing his distresses and his doubts to the King of Kings, to the covenant King, to the Lord Jesus Christ, because he says, How long, O Lord?

How long? And as you know, whenever we see that title in capital letters, we know that the title, Lord, is a royal title.

It's a regal title. It's a majestic and even a magnificent title. It's a title of the King, the covenant King, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. It's a title leading us always to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's a title that reminds us, and it should reassure us, every time we see it, that the Lord we worship is the Lord who keeps covenant. He's the one who keeps covenant.

He makes promises, and he keeps every single one of his promises. And he does so because of who he is. He's sure and steadfast. He's loyal and loving. He's trustworthy and true.

[6 : 12] And he promises that he'll always be faithful, and he will never forsake you. He's the Lord, the covenant King, the one who keeps covenant. And because of who he is, and because of what he's like, you know, tonight we can have complete confidence in the Lord.

Therefore, we have no reason to feel distant from the Lord. We have no reason to feel that we are doubting the Lord's promises. We have no reason to even become distressed by the Lord's providences, because he's the Lord, and he's the one who keeps covenant.

And the wonder of his covenant, as you know, it's a covenant of grace, which means that the Lord's promises, the Lord's pledges towards us as his people, they're all promises and pledges of his pardon, his peace, and his presence.

That's what his covenant of grace is all about. His covenant of grace, his promises and his pledges to his people, they're all about his pardon, his peace, and his presence.

And because it's a covenant of grace, it's not based upon our obedience. It's not based upon our ability to be a good person with good morals.

[7 : 24] It's not based upon our baptism or our Bible reading or our behavior. It's not even based upon our fidelity and our faithfulness to Christ and his church. No, it's a covenant of grace. It's all of grace.

And it's all of the Lord. It's all of the one who keeps covenant. Therefore, the Lord's promises and the Lord's pledges of pardon, peace, and presence, all of it is sure.

All of it is steadfast. All of it is certain. Because of who he is. He's the one who keeps covenant. And, you know, we can experience all the blessings, all the benefits.

We can enjoy all these blessings and all these benefits of his covenant of grace when we rest upon and when we rely upon this covenant king, the Lord Jesus Christ. But, you know, when we come to Psalm 13, we don't find King David doing that.

We don't find King David clinging to the Lord's promises. We don't find King David confessing all the promises of his covenant king. And that's because, as you know from your own experience, my Christian friend, it's easy to let all the promises and pledges of the Lord roll off our lips.

[8 : 44] It's much harder to live them. Especially when there are sins that we've committed, or sicknesses in our life, or struggles in our home, or there's suffering in our family, and there's sorrow in our heart.

And when things are going well, it's easy to let all the promises and all the pledges of the Lord just roll off our lips. But, you know, it's harder to live them. It's a lot harder to live them.

That's why, like David, there are times in our experience, there are times in our lives where we can feel distant from the Lord. There are times in our life when we can doubt the Lord's promises.

There are times in our life when we get distressed by the Lord's providence in our life. And we're left wondering, as David is here, saying, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

[9 : 48] How long is the devil going to be on my back? That's what he's saying there. But, you know, what's remarkable is that even in his feelings of distance and doubt and distress, David still, he still directs his prayers and his problems and all his petitions to the Lord.

He keeps looking to the Lord. And as he keeps looking to the Lord, we read there in verses 1 and 2, he has this fourfold plea. How long?

How long? How long? How long, O Lord? David's pleading with the Lord, how much longer is this going to go on for? And he's saying to the Lord, if you are the covenant king, you say you are.

If you're the covenant king who makes all these promises to his people and makes all these pledges to his people, if you're the covenant king who assures us of all his pardon and his peace and his presence every day, then how much longer is this going to go on for in my life?

And, you know, whatever was going on in David's life at the time, what's clear is that he was lacking assurance from the Lord. And he felt absolutely abandoned by the Lord. To the point that David is no longer sitting in silence.

[11 : 06] He's very vocal here in Psalm 13. In fact, David is expressing, you could even go as far as to say, he's expressing his irritation and his impatience with the Lord.

David was becoming annoyed and agitated, maybe even angry with the Lord's timing in his life. Have you ever been there, my friend?

Have you ever been there where you know that the Lord is sovereign and his plans, they're perfect, and that his providential purposes, they are always working, all the time they're working out for your good and his glory.

You know what the Bible says. And yet you question what the Lord is doing. And why he's allowing it. Why has it happened? And sometimes, maybe when we let our guard down, we become irritated, we become impatient with the Lord, we become annoyed and agitated, maybe even angry with the Lord.

But, you know, this is what makes the Bible so real and so relevant to us. Doesn't it? Especially the Psalms. Psalms are so beautiful because they always express to us and they explain to us the heartaches and the heartbreaks that we all encounter, we all experience in our life in different circumstances and different situations because we all experience those feelings of distance from the Lord.

[12 : 35] We all experience doubts where we doubt the Lord's promises. We all experience distress where we are distressed about the Lord's providence in our life. We all experience the struggles of sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow.

We all experience those feelings of being forsaken, maybe even forgotten by the Lord. We sometimes reach the point where we're questioning the Lord and asking, like David here in Psalm 13, how much longer, Lord, is this going to go on for?

How much longer? Because I can't take much more. How much longer? You know, the problem with patience, as we're seeing there in verses 1 and 2, reminds me of the Pilgrim's Progress.

I'm so glad we studied the Pilgrim's Progress a number of years ago because it gives to you all these illustrations. And if you remember the occasion when Christian was in the interpreter's house, he was shown a little room with two little children.

And one child was called passion and the other was called patience. One was called passion, the other was called patience. And as the interpreter explains to Christian, passion is discontent.

[13 : 59] Passion is demanding everything now. But patience, patience says nothing. Patience wisely remains quiet because he's willing to wait.

And you know how often we can be like passion where we're discontent, we're demanding everything from the Lord now. Lord, I want it now. And we're like passion instead of being like patience, wisely remaining quiet, being willing to wait upon the Lord to act and to assure us according to His perfect timing.

We need to be like patience, not like passion. And so we see, first of all, the problem with patience. Then secondly, the petition for patience. The petition for patience.

Look at verse 3. He says, Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say, I have prevailed over him, lest my foes rejoice, because I am shaken.

You know, when it comes to the question, how long, O Lord? David asked this question more than once. It's not just in Psalm 13 that this appears.

[15:17] It appears in many of the Psalms. But the amazing thing is, he wasn't the only one to ask this question. Asaph wrote in Psalm 79. He said, How long, O Lord, will you be angry forever?

Ethan the Ezraite also wrote in Psalm 89. How long, O Lord, will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? The prophet Habakkuk, he asked, How long, O Lord, shall I cry for help and you will not hear?

The prophet Zechariah asked the same question. How long, O Lord, will you not have mercy on Jerusalem? And Isaiah, that well-known preacher, he asked the question, How long, O Lord? How long? But you know, when Isaiah asked the question, How long, O Lord? It really made me think. Because when Isaiah was called to be a prophet and to be a preacher of God's Word, you remember that chapter in Isaiah chapter 6 where he has this beautiful vision of the Lord.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up. And he saw the glory of the Lord and he hears this question where the Lord asks, To whom shall I send and who will go for us?

[16:34] And Isaiah gives that famous response to the Lord's call upon his life where he says, Here am I. Send me. But as you read through Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah is then exhorted to preach and to pastor the people of God.

And Isaiah asks the, I suppose, a very relevant question. How long, O Lord? How long? How long do you want me to preach to this people? How long am I to pray for this people?

How long am I to pastor this people? How long am I to plead for this people? How long, O Lord? How long? And the Lord gives him an answer that he probably didn't expect.

The Lord says to Isaiah, Until no one is left, until no one is left. And you know, I often think it's a reminder to us as a church that we are to keep preaching the gospel and to keep praying for God's blessing and to keep pastoring the flock and keep pleading with people in our congregation and in our community to repent and believe in the gospel.

And we're to keep going. Even though we feel tired, even though we sometimes think it's futile, but the Lord reminds us that we're to keep going until everyone has heard the good news and that they are without excuse.

[17:56] We're to keep going. How long, O Lord? How long? Until no one is left, he says. But you know, as David, Asaph, Ethan, the Ezraite, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Isaiah, and many others knew, and as you know, my friend, I'm sure you know of this, waiting upon the Lord isn't easy.

Waiting upon the Lord isn't easy. Because as we said, even though we know the Lord to be this covenant king who makes promises and keeps his promises, we can't help it when we feel distant from the Lord's presence or when we doubt the Lord's promises or we're distressed by the Lord's providence.

You know, we can't help it when we feel forsaken or we feel that the Lord has completely forgotten us. And sad to say, sometimes those feelings, they express themselves in the form of impatience and irritation where we're annoyed and agitated by the Lord's plan and purpose.

And we know in our heart that that attitude isn't right. We know that our annoyance with the Lord is wrong because who are we?

Who are we? Is the pot to say to the potter, why have you made me this way? And yet, thankfully, the potter is patient with all his little broken and brittle pots.

[19:26] And like David here in Psalm 13, our problem with patience, it leads to a petition for patience. I need this, Psalm, a petition for patience.

Where we know that we need to patiently wait, not just to be patient with people, but to wait upon the Lord and wait upon His will by trusting His promises and trusting in His purposes, trusting in His perfect plan and His perfect providence.

And that's why David prays and petitions the Lord there in verse 3. He says, Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, lest the devil say, I prevailed over him, lest my foes rejoice, because I am shaken.

David prays and he petitions the Lord for patience, because he knows that his feelings of distance from the Lord, from the Lord's presence, or his feelings of doubting the Lord's promises or distress about the Lord's providence, he knows that they are making him feel depressed about the Lord's purposes in his life.

Where he feels like he's in darkness. He feels like he almost says he feels spiritually dead as a Christian. He feels like he's being devoured and destroyed by the devil who's going around like a roaring lion and absolutely devouring him.

[20 : 51] Which is why David directs his plea and his petition and his prayer to his covenant king, the Lord. And he says, Lord, light up my eyes. Light up my eyes.

You know, it's a beautiful prayer. Because in his feelings of distance and doubt and distress and depression and darkness and death and destruction, David is praying, he's pleading, he's petitioning the Lord for direction.

Light up my eyes. Lord, light up my eyes. And of course, direction, it only comes from the Word of God.

Because as we know the Word of God, it's the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That's what we're singing in Psalm 130. I wait for God, my soul doth wait, my hope is in His Word.

And as a Christian, David knew that. David wrote that. We sang that in Psalm 19. Because in Psalm 19, David, he emphasizes and he explains how God speaks to us.

[22 : 01] He speaks to us through His world and through His Word. And he says that the Word of the Lord, we sang it earlier, the Word of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The Word of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. And that's what David is praying here. He's praying, Lord, light up my eyes. Lord, light up my eyes.

You know, in his feelings, all these feelings of distance and doubt and distress and depression and darkness and death and destruction, he's pleading, Lord, light up my eyes.

But David is praying for patience because he knows, and you know, I know this, we cannot rest and rely upon our feelings.

It's good to have feelings, but our feelings are often misleading. Our feelings are often misleading. And you know, if anyone knew this to be true, it was the German reformer, Martin Luther.

[23 : 10] Martin Luther was a man full of feelings. He was a man who loved and even lived Psalm 13. He often had, if you look into the life of Martin Luther, he had feelings of distance from the Lord.

He doubted the Lord. He was distressed by the Lord's providence. He was depressed. He was in darkness. He felt like he was sleeping the sleep of death and destruction.

Luther always felt that he wasn't good enough or did enough or knew enough or prayed enough or read enough or walked closely with the Lord enough or that he was faithful enough to be a Christian.

Luther always had these times, these moments when he felt so far away from the Lord. And Luther discovered though that he can't rest or rely upon his feelings.

He cannot rest. We cannot rest or rely upon our feelings. That's why Luther wrote and I've quoted it many times to you before because it's so important. Feelings can be so misleading.

[24 : 14] And as Luther said, the man who loved Psalm 13, he said, feelings come and feelings go and feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the word of God, not else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should feel condemned for want of some sweet token, there is one greater than my heart whose word cannot be broken. And what's the conclusion Luther comes to? I'll trust in God's unchanging word till soul and body sever. For though all things should pass away, his word shall stand forever.

And this is why David's experience in Psalm 13, it went from the problem with patience, verses 1 and 2, to the petition for patience, verses 3 and 4, to the promise of patience, verses 5 and 6.

That's what we see lastly, the promise of patience. The promise of patience, look at verse 5. David says, but I have trusted, but, there's a change, but I have trusted in your steadfast love.

[25 : 23] My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. As was David, as he brings Psalm 13 to a conclusion, having directed all his feelings, all his feelings of distance from the Lord, doubt, distress, depression, darkness, and destruction, all these feelings have now turned, as he says there, to delight.

And all these feelings have turned to delight because he's no longer trusting in his feelings. Feelings come and feelings go. Feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the word of God.

Not else is worth believing. He's trusting in his word. And David knows that his word presents to him, as he says there in verse 5, I have trusted in your steadfast love.

He's trusting in the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness. I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. David, you know, he's patiently resting and relying upon the promises of the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness. You know, I love that phrase, steadfast love.

[26 : 43] I think we often overlook it in the Bible. The phrase steadfast love and faithfulness, it's a phrase that you could say it expresses and it emphasizes and even explains to us one of the most important Hebrew words in our Bible.

I mentioned the word before, the word chesed. Chesed. Great word to learn. You know, for centuries translators, they struggled to translate the sentiment of the word, the expression, the feeling, you could say, of this word, chesed.

Because there are no English words that really capture or convey the Lord's love. And it's not just his love, it's his undeserving love, his unbreakable love, his unrestricted love, his unconditional and unchanging covenant love towards us.

That's why different Bible versions, they use different words to translate this Hebrew word, chesed. Some use the word love or mercy or compassion or unfailing love as we'll sing in Sing Psalms. It's constant love or steadfast love as it is here. Steadfast love and faithfulness. You know, it was the Old Testament scholar, Dale Ralph Davis, he said about this word, chesed, steadfast love.

[28 : 01] He said, chesed is a love that's surprising and sustaining. It's a love that never lets go. It's a love with super glue on it.

Great way to describe it. The Lord's steadfast love is a love that never lets go because it has super glue on it. My friend, the Lord's chesed, the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness is all because of who He is.

He's the covenant king. He's the king of kings. He's the Lord of lords. He's the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who keeps covenant. He makes promises. He keeps His promises.

And despite our many feelings, and there are many, and despite our many feelings, and there are many feelings of distance and doubt and distress, despite it all, every time we come back to the Bible, we are given direction in His Word and we are encouraged and enabled to delight in the Lord because of who He is.

Not because of who we are, but because of who He is. Because of His steadfast love and faithfulness. I have trusted, He says, in your steadfast love and faithfulness.

[29 : 21] But you know, what's remarkable is that the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord is not just revealed to us as a promise in His Word. The steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord has been revealed to us as a portion in God's Son.

It's been revealed to us, or He has been revealed to us, in the portion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because, you know, and this is where we need to keep coming back to, the glory of the Gospel is that the Word of God became flesh.

And He became flesh so that we would behold His glory. That's what John wants us to see in his Gospel. He wants us to behold His glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full.

And what's He full of? Grace and truth. He's full of steadfast love and faithfulness. That's who He is. That's who He is.

You know, my friend, the promise of patience has been revealed to us in the portion of our covenant King, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as you know, He was revealed in order to relate to us.

[30 : 27] He became like us. He became one of us. He was touched with a feeling of our infirmities. Where you could say that He embodied our sin and He endured our sickness.

He experienced all our stresses. He entered into our suffering and He encountered our sorrow. And it was all so that when we are living Psalm 13, when Psalm 13 becomes our Psalm, we have fellowship with His suffering.

And then we will direct all our feelings of distance and doubt and distress and depression and darkness and death and destruction.

We will direct it all to the Lord, the covenant King, the one who is faithful. And it's then our feelings of darkness will be turned to delight.

It's a wonderful Psalm, isn't it? That's why when Sovereign Grace Music sang, How Long, O Lord? How Long?

[31 : 38] They could see that the problem with patience and the petition for patience gives to us ultimately the promise of patience. How long, O Lord?

How long? Till Your glory fills our eyes and our faith is turned to sight till our thirsty souls are satisfied.

How long, O Lord? How long? My friend, when you are living, Psalm 13, direct it all to the Lord and He will turn it all to delight.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, we give thanks to Thee this evening that when we come to any part of the Bible, Lord, a God who speaks to us and who speaks to us powerfully and who speaks to us personally and we pray that whether we are living Psalm 13 or not, that this, Thy Word, would find lodgment in our heart and that when we need it, that when we are in our darkness or when we are depressed or when we feel distant or doubting or downcast in our mind, help us, Lord, to direct everything to Thee, to the God who is faithful, to the covenant King who makes promises and keeps His promises, who never changes and whose steadfast love and faithfulness endures forever.

Lord, help us to trust Thee even in the darkness, to know that the darkness is as light to our God. Lord, bless us then, we pray, watch over us, we ask, and help us, we pray, as we go into this new week to keep looking to Jesus, to know Him, to love Him, and to always follow Him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

[33 : 36] Cleanse us, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

We're going to sing the words of that psalm, Psalm 13. We're singing in the Sing Psalms version, page 14 of the Blue Psalm book, Psalm 13 on page 14.

But before we sing, a few questions that need answers.

Okay. No discussing at the back. Question one, which Christian band sang a version of Psalm 13? Sovereign Grace music. So I'd encourage you to listen to it if you can. Question two, what were the names of the children in the interpreter's house? Well done.

[34 : 41] Passion and patience. Which one are you? There's one to answer. Question three, in his feelings of darkness, what does David pray?

No. Light up my eyes. Well done. Light up my eyes. Which, question four, which reformer said that we can't rely upon our feelings?

Martin Luther. Yep. A good man. So don't rely upon our feelings. We trust in God's unchanging word. Okay.

Well done, guys. You do very well listening. Okay. Psalm 13, page 14. We're going to sing the whole psalm.

How long will you forget me, Lord? Will you forget always? How long, Lord, will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze? And then at the end of the psalm, there's promise, the promise of patience.

[35 : 44] But still I trust your constant love. That's the chesed word. Constant love. You save and set me free. With joy I will extol the Lord who has been good to me.

So we'll sing the whole psalm of Psalm 13 to God's praise. How long will you forget me, Lord?

Will you forget always? How long will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze?

How long must I be sad each day in deep perplexity?

How long will I have your poor and stand in triumph for me?

[37 : 12] O Lord, my God, God, consider me and give me your reply.

Light up my eyes for I will sleep the sleep of those who die.

Then would my heaven be clear at last I'm late in law and so my my falls would sing for joy to see my over grow.

But still I trust your constant love your constant love you save and set me free.

With joy I will extol the Lord who has been good good to me.

[38 : 56] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.